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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, here we are at the 4th of July weekend! Many of you will be enjoying an extra-long holiday weekend (not me!) or starting a nice summer vacation. Enjoy it! Here, it will be business as usual with all kinds of things to keep us busy - with additional responsibilities added-on!

Work is hectic as usual, and usually a little more. It's budget time again; which means everyone is stressed out more than usual with that "untimely" task. Goes with the territory, I guess.

Around the home front, things are progressing slowly, but progressing. The new lawn is really starting to fill in nicely. I'm amazed, but there's a lot of green where once was a few weeds and a sandy mess. I still have more work to do, but pleased so far. The pool is "open" but it needs some cleaning to be really ready for use. Hopefully, this weekend. Other than that, just the typical things need doing.

In the meantime, I'm going to enjoy the weekend. A barbecue or two, some cold refreshments, and relaxation mixed in with the usual chores. Enjoy the holiday, but not too much. Please, be careful with fireworks and don't drink and drive!

Until next time...

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Ted M. Hoff Joins Logitech as Vice President and General Manager, Interactive Gaming

Logitech , international market leader in human interface devices that define the way people link to information in business, at home and online, has named Ted M. Hoff, a well known figure in the interactive entertainment industry, to head the company's interactive gaming business. In this role, Mr. Hoff will oversee Logitech's growing WingMan product family, which recently became a separate business division, developing and implementing strategies for continuing growth and diversification.

Mr. Hoff has played a key management role in corporate operating divisions, consumer products marketing, Internet start-ups and large corporations specializing in consumer electronics hardware and software. Before joining Logitech, he was chief operating officer of Tranz-Send Broadcasting Network, the parent company of Internet start-up ClickMovie.com. Additional former positions include senior vice president of marketing and sales at Time Warner Interactive, senior vice president and general manager of Fox Interactive, president of Atari North America and founder of Atari Interactive, executive vice president of Sega of America and executive vice president of RQ Interactive (formerly Reality Quest Corporation).

''Ted brings a wealth of expertise in consumer behavior, interactive gaming

and the Internet to Logitech," said Guerrino De Luca, company president and chief executive officer. ‘‘His strategic industry perspective and management experience will be key in taking our interactive gaming business to a new level, as we pursue our goal of strengthening Logitech’s game controller presence on the PC-driven desktop, while at the same time, moving beyond the PC into additional gaming environments."

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, I got myself into a bit of trouble last week when I mentioned that I had been just a stone’s throw away from our esteemed publisher and DIDN’T stop by. Hah, most people are happy when I don’t stop by!

Anyway, I figured that since it was early in the day, Mr. Man would have been at his day job. And the truth is that I just don’t trust myself around all those highway on-ramps and off-ramps. Had I deviated from my specified route I would probably have been lost in limbo for days. Add to that the fact that Dana and I have only been in close physical proximity three or four times in all the years that we’ve known each other, and you can see that "having to drop by" isn’t really a big issue.

Actually, that comment last week made me think a bit about one of the ways that computers have changed our society. Twenty years ago you would have stopped dead in your tracks if you heard someone say that they didn’t even know what half of your friends looked like.

Today, it’s not a big deal. Out of all the friends I’ve got (and I’m the kind of person who likes to have a lot of friends), more than half of them are people that I’ve never met in person. And the heck of it is that some of them are very good, close friends. I’m not sure that this constitutes social evolution, but it does make things interesting. It’s not only the social boundaries that are disappearing, but the physical ones as well. National boundaries now mean little, and people can exchange ideas easily and without even the "work" of sending a letter. It’s that old chinese curse come true... "May you live in interesting times".

Let’s see how interesting things are on the UseNet these days...

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Curt Johnsen asks an interesting question about burning CDs on his Falcon:

"Using falcon mkX and hddriver 14m ram, yamaha 4416sx burner,

cdrecorder, can only get it to burn at 2x, when I try in4x, I keep getting scsi error, re4corder not ready. Is there a way to improve this situation?"

Brian Becroft tells Curt:

"I have read the other posts, but am not understanding something, despite what else is said:

The other posts are (?) presuming you are reading from another CD-ROM drive and writing using your Yamaha 4416sx in one operation?? If so this is not stated in this original post. In fact your post does not mention the source that I can see.

The most common situation is where Falcon owners have the audio files on their hard drive and are then writing these audio or data files to the CDR.

There really should not be any problem whatsoever given this type of situation. I have a C-LAB Falcon and I know two other C-LAB Falcon owners and we all own Yamaha CD writers, not all the same models - all different in fact, and I am 100% certain that we all write many CDs, Data and Audio at 4x speed without any problems, none at all!

So I would say that a clearer explanation of your situation would be in order, your system and how you are doing it and so on.

On a different note, but possibly related, one of these C-LAB owners I refer to above was trying out Aniplayer and wondered why it would only play AVR files for 30 seconds or so and then freeze the computer - well the simpler answer was that he had the graphics mode set to 256 colors - and this ties up the falcon a great deal.

When he set the Falcon graphics to 2-color mode then there was no problem whatever.

Maybe this is worth trying in your circumstance.

Either way - if you are writing a CD from files off the hard drive then 4x writing is easily possible, but reading off a CD-ROM and then writing in one operation, well I am not sure if this would work at 4x writing, but then in most cases this way of writing is not necessary at all.

Please post us with more details or criticism of my story, I would be interested to know the real answer to your problem."

Claes Hilmerup adds:

"I’ve had the following explanation from SoundPool:
SCSI is too slow to handle 4X burning, so if 4X is to be used, only an IDE-disk is recommended.

I did also come to this conclusion myself when I helped a friend after he had just bought a 4X burner and experienced exactly this situation that SoundPool told me when I asked about why it wouldn’t work... After a few audio tracks, the burning just stopped (buffer underrun) - but when we copied the files to the IDE-disk instead, it worked perfectly at 4X. I tried this both on my own, somewhat accelerated, 16MB Falcon - and on my friends’ Falcon, which was in it’s original appearance with only 4MB. Both were, of course, CPU clock

patched and perfectly functional with CAF and always running with 2 colors to keep the speed up..."

Brian comes back and posts:

"Hi there Claes - something still does not make sense to me. For a start, the SoundPool Explanation is not qualified by a more full explanation to make sense. While it may be obvious to some, to me - I need it spelled out!

The three Falcon owners here including myself have for years now written CDs at 4x with the source files being our SCSI drives. The files are typically songs created in Cubase Audio, so they are files on the Hard Drive (some CDs are data only too). The three of us all have different models of Hard Drive and they are all SCSI. There isn't a problem. It is news to me that it can't be done, and that you must use an IDE Hard Drive instead!

The newer CD writers have more buffer RAM also - mine is the old Yamaha CD100 with I think half meg buffer RAM, the later ones had 2MB.

Well, I have seen the 2 1/2" IDE drives up to 20gigabyte in size now, so this would be a good solution no doubt - not to mention the 75 gig in the bigger size. I only wish that Cubase Audio would record onto the IDE drives, it only records onto SCSI.

So I don't understand this issue over the SCSI bus not being suitable for 4x writing, I'm sure it can handle the data transfer rates no problem.

So another thing is I have not checked out SoundPool for a while, but it would be good if they supported the IDE CD writers which are very cheap, and another thing - their re-writable support was implemented only in a minimal way.

I guess I might not understand the situation, but the SoundPool explanation sounds like "a load of old cobblers" to me. I think a more technical discussion is in order to justify that claim - it may well be other issues - one thing I do know is that the SCSI bus can transfer the data and heaps more than what is necessary to keep a writer going at 4x speed. One can test the SCSI bus to see how much data it transfers for a start..."

Curt posts an update:

"In regards to Brian's post: I was writing audio files from external scsi seagate hard drives to the yamaha cd recorder. I have since installed a maxtor ide drive 13 gig 3.5". I used a falcon adaptor from wizztronics, and now everything is working at 4x. using cdrecorder from sound pool."

Paul Nurminen adds his experiences:

"Well, here's my story...

I've got a 14meg Falcon+Nemesis (with the "clock patch" and other CAF related fixes done to it long ago), and use ExtenDOS Gold and the latest CD Writer Suite. I can do 4x when burning data backups with "CD Backup", and 4x when burning ISO9660 CDRs with "CD InScriptOr", but 2x is the best I can get when using "CD Writer" for audio CDs.

I've had numerous e-mail discussions with Roger Burrows of Anodyne Software (and he's been _most_ helpful!), and I've experimented with a few different hard disk drivers (ICD, CECILE, and HD Driver), with varying "top speeds" reported; under both MagiC and TOS; with and without the Nemesis. But I just can't get 4x writes with audio discs.

Bottom line: Roger tells me they're more demanding on the processor than burning data CDRs, and he also recommended a fast IDE drive as the only real way to do it [and for the record, my Falcon's Conner 84meg could _never_ be mistaken for "fast", so it's out of the question!]

And to the best of my knowledge, the Nemesis (or any other accelerator on the Falcon) _will not_ have any effect on SCSI transfer speeds. It will improve IDE drives though."

Lyndon Amsdon asks for help with picking out a laser printer:

"I would like to get a Laser printer for my ST. The 3 packages I use the most are Papyrus v4, Imagecopy v4 and Scooter. All three have drivers for HP Laserjets. Papyrus and Scooter have drivers for the Atari SLM. Getting hold of an Atari SLM would be difficult and I don't think it would work on a Milan II because it needs the DMA port.

I have been looking at some PC mags and have seen a HP Laserjet 1100/A for 232 GBP. There is also the Epson EPL-5800 which is extremely good value for money at 236 GBP (more memory than the HP etc)

There is also a Brother HL-1030 which is cheap at 186 GBP. It does clearly say that it is a "Windows dedicated printer"

Will the HP drivers work for the Brother and Epson? Has any one had an experiences with these lasers or any others?"

Kerstin Hoef-Emden tells Lyndon:

"Have a look at the bigger siblings of the cheapest (= GDI) printers and have a look at the manufacturer's websites. We have a Brother HL-1240 laser printer at the institute. The webpages of Brother say, that it can be run with a HP Laserjet II driver on the parallel port. So I think, this one might do with Atari as well. (I didn't try!)"

Jim Logan adds:

"I have used HP LaserJet2s to LaserJet6s and have had no problems. If it says Windows Only then I suggest you don't buy it. If you are looking for excellent output then go for 600 dpi."

Peter Schneider adds his experiences:

"I've been printing with a HP Laserjet 5 L since February '95. As I had to replace the toner cartridge a couple of weeks ago, I knew that the HP 1100 used the same cartridge, a fact that makes it more probable to get that stuff for reasonable prices.

So I'm happy with that printer. All my soft comes along with a suitable driver, e.g. most _deskjet_ drivers do as well.

Keep away from GDI printers because they are 'Windows only'! If the

paper is being vertically hold, be sure to cover the printer whenever it’s not used!"

Claes Holmerup adds:

"You should be able to use any laser printer which is HP laserjet compatible - but don’t even look at the cheap "Windows only" printers - they won’t work at all. HP laserjet (which almost all laser printers are compatible with) works with already existing drivers in just about any program."

Ken Hartlen asks about using STinG with his ISP:

"Anyone out there using STing with a PSINet service provider?

As of a couple of days ago PSINet/Interlog can only be accessed with PPP. Even with the help of a few people here, I have never been able to establish a PPP connection. Now I have no choice but to get it to work, buy a new computer or change providers.

I get as far as getting the dynamic IP from PSINet and then all I see is "Initializing Link" and it eventually timeouts out.

Are there any very important settings in the configuration files that must be set using info from the ISP?"

Daniel Dreibelbis tells Ken:

"If you do decide to change providers, I’d suggest going to LOOK (formerly Internet Direct). Both Ken Macdonald and I have used Falcons with STing with no problems hooking up via PPP, and we could probably get you a working script to get up and started. BTW, LOOK I believe still supports SLIP.

I’ve had nothing but trouble in the one month I was with Interlog: apart from one tech who was genuinely concerned why I couldn’t log into it via SLIP, I had nothing but cluelessness from the rest of the techs. Our Phoenix editor has recently dropped his PSInet account due to concerns he had."

Pål Monstad asks for info:

"I want to connect a SCSI ZIP drive to a Link II host adapter. Does this work on a ST? Is it possible to auto boot from this drive? I’ll use HDDriver."

Mike Harvey tells Pål:

"I believe I heard when they first came out that the ZIP disk doesn’t provide the power required for the Link II. You can use it but it takes some type of extra connector in place to tape the power off one of the other pins in the SCSI connection I believe."

THE authority as far as all things hard drive are concerned, Uwe Seimet, tells Pål:

"I can’t comment on the the extra connector but as far as HDDRIVER is concerned you can auto boot from the ZIP. You can auto boot from any removable drive (except for ATAPI drives like the LS-120) just like you can boot from a hard disk."

Well folks, that’s it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Sony Drops Connectix Suit!
Midway’s Arcade Hits, Volume 1!
New Mortal Kombat! ’Koudelka’!
Dreamcast Hacked! And much more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Hackers Break Dreamcast Safeguards, Distribute Games Online

A group of underground computer programmers has broken through copyright protections on Sega’s Dreamcast game console, sparking a new explosion of pirated game software online in just a week’s time.

The Dreamcast game system has been viewed as one of the most secure digital entertainment systems on the market, with internal copy protection and a CD that holds nearly twice as much data as an ordinary disc.

But late last week, a group calling itself "Utopia" released a set of copied games online--along with a software program that would trick the Dreamcast hardware into playing the games without any modifications to the hardware itself.

"Finally, though no one really expected it, we made your dreams come true: Dreamcast BootCD V1.1--boot copies and imports on a NON-chipped (!) standard consumer model," the group wrote in an information file distributed with the software.

Since that time, several games per day have been released into the wild, traded on underground networks such as Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Several Web sites are tracking the quickly growing scene, though they do not provide downloads of the games themselves.

The release is bad news for Sega and more broadly for digital entertainment companies, which are scrambling to find ways to protect their wares online.

Music companies, which are seeing their songs easily turned into compact MP3 files and distributed through services such as Napster or Gnutella, are at the front line of this war against piracy, with the most to lose in the short term.

Illegal copying has also been a thorn in gaming companies' sides for years, but the problem has grown worse with the advent of fast Net connections that allow gamers to trade huge files online. The industry's trade association estimated that $3.2 billion was lost to illegal copying of games in 1998, the last full year for which estimates are available, although not all of this was online-based piracy.

These issues have prompted some games firms to shift titles to a subscription model, where play actually happens online and revenues come from monthly fees rather than sales of physical product. Music companies, too, are mulling this move to subscription services, rather than having consumers pay by the song or album.

Unlike games that run on personal computers, console games such as the Sony PlayStation have at least minimal anti-piracy protection built in by the fact they need special hardware and software to run. Stealing these games involves several steps beyond downloading and uncompressing the program, such as designing and installing an unauthorized computer chip on the console.

The PlayStation has fought a running battle against companies and individuals that create "mod" chips allowing customers to play copied and imported games. The company has tweaked its hardware more than a dozen times to help thwart these traders, but the underground commerce has continued.

Sega hoped to avoid this problem by using a new technology it calls GD-Roms, which hold a little more than 1 GB of information on a disc instead of the standard 650 MB of a rewritable CD. This is compressed in a proprietary format that can't be read by ordinary drives.

The company now acknowledges, however, that there was a "loophole" in the original hardware and software anti-piracy protections. That has been fixed in new Sega-produced games, and the new development tools have been given to outside game companies, a spokesman said.

"As far as we're concerned, this is an issue that is no longer the case," said Charles Bellfield, director of communications for Sega. "We have made changes to our tool set to make sure it's no longer possible."

That may or may not be true for the most recent games. According to sites tracking releases, 18 pirated games had already been released in the week following the first appearance of the Utopia hack, with another underground group, "Kalisto," joining in the releases. Some of these games, such as "Evolution 2" and "Marvel vs. Capcom 2," hit retail shelves just a few days ago.

Some in the computer underground say that not all full Dreamcast games will fit on a recordable CD. But this is far from a significant hurdle, they add--unimportant game features, such as the background audio soundtrack, can be "ripped" out to save space while leaving the game itself intact.

These games are more than a point, click and play download, however.

Finding them can be difficult, and even then it can take hours to make a copy. Both the games and the loading software must then be burned onto a CD, using often-finicky burning software.

CNET News.com was able to download a functioning version of the Utopia boot software and a version of the "Dead or Alive 2" game.

Sega says it will take action against Web sites and other venues that distribute unauthorized copies of its games, as well as make whatever software or hardware modifications are needed to block the copying process. Along with several other game companies, it recently sued Yahoo for allowing people to sell counterfeit games and illegal hardware on the company's auction site.

"Pirating software is illegal," Bellfield said. "We will vigorously defend our software and content."

Infogrames Invades Stores This Week With Looney Tunes Collector: Alert! for Game Boy Color

The First Of A New Adventure Collection Series Will Appeal to Looney Tunes Fans Of All Ages

Greetings Earthlings! Marvin The Martian is at it again attempting to destroy our beloved planet in Infogrames' innovative Game Boy Color title, Looney Tunes Collector: Alert! The first title in the new Looney Tunes Collector series, Alert! will appeal to Looney Tunes lovers everywhere as it reaches most major retail stores this month. Look out for Marvin's Illudium Q-36 Explosive Space Modulator; it's a doozy!

The adventure begins with Bugs Bunny en route to Pismo Beach for a vacation. During his preparation Bugs Bunny overhears Marvin The Martian yelling at his dog, K9 for throwing away ten parts of a teleporter needed to blow up the Earth. Now, Bugs Bunny must find all ten parts to save the world from Marvin's devious plans.

Players, as Bugs Bunny, will work their way through twenty graphically stunning environments searching for teleporter parts and encountering up to 47 other Looney Tunes characters including Witch Hazel, Yosemite Sam, Elmer Fudd, Daffy Duck, Foghorn Leghorn and many more. These characters are collected by the player and can be called upon throughout the game to help foil Marvin's attempt to destroy Earth. In addition, players will be able to compare and trade their collection of characters with friends who also have Alert! They will have the chance to collect, trade and play even more missions with a planned second title in the Looney Tunes Collector series, Looney Tunes Collector: Attack!.

''Looney Tunes Collector: Alert! allows children to do what they are most fascinated with -- collecting things," said Mike Markey, vice president of marketing for Infogrames' San Jose Label. ''Add to that the world of Looney Tunes and its extensive realm of characters, plus a fascinating fun-filled adventure and children have a game that they just can't put down and that their parents will treasure."

''Infogrames has done a fantastic job of bringing the Looney Tunes characters to life," said Michael Harkavy, Vice President, Warner Bros. Worldwide Publishing, Kids' WB! Music, Interactive Entertainment. ''This is

yet another example of the great product that grows from the extraordinary relationship between Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and Infogrames."

Another fascinating element of the game will include six head-to-head mini-games utilizing the cable link feature of the Game Boy Color. Players will be able to win different characters from their friends in real-time competitions such as The Ping-Pong Bomb, The Rocket and The Rainbow Cannon Ball. Or, they can compete just for fun by playing these classic games: Rock-Paper-Scissors, Musical Chairs and Simon Says.

Developed by Infogrames' Lyon Studio, Looney Tunes Collector: Alert! will reach most major retail outlets this week at an estimated retail price of $29.99.

"Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 1" Brings Arcade Classics Home for Sega Dreamcast

Midway Games Inc. announced that ''Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 1" for Sega Dreamcast is available in retail outlets now.

''Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 1" for Sega Dreamcast is available at a suggested retail price of $29.99 and combines six of the company's most popular classic arcade titles: ''Joust," ''Bubbles," ''Robotron 2084," ''Sinistar," ''Defender" and ''Defender II." The one- and two-player games feature easy set-up and familiar gameplay for fans of all ages and skill levels.

''Gamers still enjoy the classic video games that were legendary in the arcade," said Helene Sheeler, vice president of marketing for Midway. ''These classics have been re-created with an arcade feel and can now be enjoyed at home in a digitally re-mastered format for today's home consoles."

In this version of ''Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 1," players can choose to fight the mutant robots in ''Robotron 2084," do some heavy-duty cleaning in a game of ''Bubbles," or take to the air on a winged bird of prey as they battle opponents over the lava pits in ''Joust." Players can also choose to protect the Earth's inhabitants from alien abductors in ''Defender" and ''Defender II," or race the clock to destroy the ultimate evil in ''Sinistar."

A Nintendo 64 version of ''Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 1" will be released in the fall and will include ''Spy Hunter," ''Sinistar," ''Defender," ''Root Beer Tapper," ''Joust" and ''Robotron 2084."

Infogrames Brings Mystery and Suspense to Store Shelves This Week With Koudelka for Playstation

Three strangers are led to the haunted Nemeton Monastery in Wales, England, and are forced to help each other to discover what lies behind a series of brutal crimes. Infogrames announced today that it is bringing Koudelka, a gothic tale of sorcery and mystery, to most major retail stores this week. Join Koudelka and her companions on their quest through the ominous

monastery to reveal the sinister events that have taken place there.

The game puts the player in the role of Koudelka Lasant, a young orphan who supports herself by serving as a medium for those who wish to communicate with the spirit world. Having displayed strong psychic abilities all her life, Koudelka is drawn to the monastery by the summoning of a strong spirit. Koudelka is not alone in her quest for answers. To assist her in her journey, she is joined by Edward Plunkett, a young romantic who traveled to the monastery to investigate the rumors he has heard, and Father James O'Flaherty, a broken-hearted middle-aged priest, who has come to retrieve something that was stolen from The Vatican. What they don't expect, however, is to learn that they need to rely on each other to defeat the evil that resides in the monastery.

''Koudelka truly immerses the player into its compelling storyline," said David Riley, director of marketing for Infogrames' San Jose Label. ''The combination of the game's beautiful cinematics, immersive gameplay, and interesting characters will keep players on the edge of their seat until the end."

Koudelka's arsenal of weaponry ranges from medieval two-handed swords, to more modern weapons such as rifles and pistols. The characters also have at their disposal numerous magical spells, each of which requires a certain amount of magical power that the characters earn. Players determine the ultimate growth of their characters throughout the game by assigning points earned in combat to character attributes, and by finding items that enhance their skills. Strategy comes into play each time a battle ensues because players determine which of their characters they will fight with, and the type of offense they will use. The possible combinations offered by character, weapon, magic, and armor strengths are endless.

Turn-based battles take place on 3D tactical maps. The monastery itself is rendered in graphically haunting, lifelike 3D backgrounds and the game boasts beautifully developed cinematics that focus on the intense storyline.

Koudelka was developed for SNK by Sacnoth and was recently released to a rousing reception in Japan. Koudelka is available at an estimated retail price of $39.99 and can be found at most major retail outlets.

Infogrames Enchants Stores This Week With Silver for Sega Dreamcast

The Highly Anticipated Adventure/RPG Game Brings Wizardry And Magic To Most Major Retail Stores

Grab your sword, because the village women are missing and David needs your help! Silver, Infogrames' anticipated adventure/RPG title for the Dreamcast begins shipping to most major retail stores this week. Brandish your sword and shield and get ready for an exciting adventure through the dense, dark, misty forests in the realm of Silver.

Silver, a corrupt and sinister sorcerer, rules the land of Jarrah with an iron fist. He and his henchmen have abducted the village women as part of a pact with the almighty god, Apocalypse. The player, as David, a promising young knight whose wife languishes among the captured, is the only hope for stopping Silver and his minions.

To complete his quest, David must obtain and master eight magical orbs that will allow him to summon the forces of fire, ice, life, lightning, earth, acid, time, and light. These orbs will grant him the power to battle Silver's dark sorcery.

''Silver offers gamers a stunning adventure filled with beautifully rendered interactive worlds and fascinating foes and allies," said David Riley, director of marketing for Infogrames' San Jose label. ''The game's intuitive interface and design is a perfect fit for the advanced technology of the Dreamcast system."

Players never experience the same situation twice as they roam freely around Jarrah in a non-linear pattern. They explore a variety of areas that include the tranquil island of Haven, the blasted ice plains of Winter and the underground rivers of blood at Metalon. As the player wanders throughout the mystical land, he encounters more than 50 unique, fascinating characters, some of which may be recruited as allies to assist in his quest against the evilsorcerer. Characters range from harmless imps to frightening bosses that include an evil ice dragon and a giant rat god. With an advanced artificial intelligence system in place, these enemies react intuitively and unpredictably to changing conditions.

Developed by Spiral House, Silver is available at an estimated retail price of $39.99 and can be found at most major retail outlets.

All-New ''Mortal Kombat: Special Forces" Available for the PlayStation Game Console

Midway Games Inc. Thursday announced that the all-new ''Mortal Kombat: Special Forces" for the PlayStation game console is now available at retail outlets.

This release marks ''Mortal Kombat's" debut in the 3D action genre and provides an enriched plot and gameplay, which adds to the lore of the highly successful ''Mortal Kombat" series.

Originally introduced in 1992, ''Mortal Kombat" has become a billion dollar entertainment franchise, encompassing numerous licensed products, television series, two major motion pictures and blockbuster coin-operated arcade and home video games.

'''Mortal Kombat: Special Forces' will captivate the millions of loyal 'Mortal Kombat' fans and further broaden the dynamic appeal of the franchise," said Helene Sheeler, vice president of marketing for Midway. '''Special Forces' expands the 'Mortal Kombat' legend, adding new depth to the characters while delivering the engrossing action players have come to expect from the series."

The storyline in ''Mortal Kombat: Special Forces" takes players through eight perilous levels filled with enemies, weapons and puzzles. Through these levels, players take the role of Special Forces agent Jackson Briggs (Jax), one of the most popular ''Mortal Kombat" characters. As Jax, players must defeat the Black Dragon gang, lead by Jax's sworn enemy, Kano.

''Mortal Kombat: Special Forces" offers a rich fighting engine that features hand-to-hand and weapons combat. Players must use martial arts skills--consisting of basic and special moves as well as ''Mortal

Kombat’s" signature combos. Players also have the option to use many different types of weapons that are found throughout the 3D realm.

‘‘Mortal Kombat: Special Forces Key Features"

*Rich fighting system with basic, special and combination moves

*Storyline featuring cinematic sequences expands ‘‘Mortal Kombat‘‘ legend

* 3D levels for exploration and gameplay choices

* Hidden weapons and secrets

* Familiar enemy leaders and all-new adversaries

Infogrames Sends Endurance Racing to Store Shelves This Week With Test Drive Le Mans for Game Boy Color

Le Mans Racing Game Offers Accelerated Day-To-Night-To-Day Racing

Infogrames announced that Test Drive Le Mans for Game Boy Color is shipping to stores this week. Test Drive Le Mans is currently available for the personal computer and the PlayStation game console, and will also be available for Segafi Dreamcast in winter 2000.

‘‘Test Drive Le Mans is the perfect game to test your Game Boy’s endurance," said Laddie Ervin, director of marketing for sports and racing titles at Infogrames. ‘‘Players must plan pit stops, battle ever-changing weather conditions and survive a day-to-night-to-day challenge-it’s a game of skill and staying power."

Test Drive Le Mans delivers a realistic racing sensation at heart stopping speeds of up to 150 mph. Test Drive Le Mans, the officially licensed game of the Automobile Club de l’Ouestfi (ACO), offers 10 officially licensed team cars including BMW V12 LMR (Prototype), Panoz Roadster LMP (Prototype), Audi R8R (Prototype), Toyota GT-ONE (GT1), Panoz Esperante (GT1), Nissan R390 (GT1), GTC Competition (GT1), Marcos Mantara LM600 (GT2), Konrad Motorsport (GT2) and Chamberlain Engineering (GT2).

Test Drive Le Mans offers 21 tracks, including the legendary Le Mans 24 Hours track in the region of Sarthe, France. The game has three game modes including Le Mans, Arcade and Championship. The Le Mans mode offers gamers a chance to participate in day-to-night-to-day racing in accelerated time, while the Arcade and Championship modes each offer 10 different tracks from which to choose.

Test Drive Le Mans for the Game Boy Color simulates the real-world conditions of the 24 hour race with players facing unpredictable weather. Players will find themselves racing in clear weather, rain and fog, in both day and nighttime conditions. Players must also keep their car in good form by making pit stops to check tire wear and to monitor fuel levels.

Test Drive Le Mans for the Game Boy Color is developed and published by Infogrames. It will be available for an estimated retail price of $29.99 and will offer a battery cartridge so players can save games.

Infogrames Gets the Heart Pumping With Xtreme Sports for Game Boy Color -- In Stores This Week

Infogrames announced Thursday that Xtreme Sports for the Game Boy Color will begin shipping to stores this week.

‘‘Now gamers can hit the waves, surf the sky and ride the rails from the safety of their Game Boy Color," said Laddie Ervin, director of marketing for sports and racing titles at Infogrames. ‘‘If you can’t actually be out skysurfing or skateboarding this summer, Xtreme Sports offers gamers the next best thing."

Xtreme Sports tells the story of Guppi and her boyfriend Fin. They are about to embark on the ultimate island adventure thanks to a challenge from the Xtreme Cola Company. The Xtreme Cola Company has invited all extreme sports fanatics to duke it out on the mysterious Xtreme Sports Island. Participants must master Street Luge, Skateboarding, In-line Skating, Surfing and Skyboarding in their battle to make it to the top. Playing as either Guppi or Fin, the player will compete against more than 200 competitors on 25 unique tracks.

Players can choose from a Practice Mode or the Xtreme Island Adventure Mode. In Practice Mode, players will have access to 15 challenges with three difficulty settings. Xtreme Island Adventure Mode pits the player against opponents in an effort to collect medals and unravel the mystery behind the devious Bone-Heads gang.

While participating in events and exploring the island, Guppi and Fin will encounter many friends as well as a few foes. Some people will offer advice, while others will issue a challenge, and players will come across secret treats if close attention is paid to the clues.

In order to keep an accurate count of the player’s medals, new players must sign up in the Sign-In Hut. Referees will keep beginners from entering the more advanced events without the necessary medals earned, and different referees will require different medal counts to qualify for each event, so it’s up to the player to pick out the pushovers!

Guppi and Fin will also need energy to compete in the events, and as a result, players will find power-ups called Twitchy Shakes scattered around the island. The effect of drinking a Twitchy Shake will vary from event to event, but Twitchy Shakes can invoke everything from higher speeds to extra jumps to invincibility!

Developed by WayForward Technologies and published by Infogrames, Xtreme Sports will be available at an estimated retail price of $29.99 and will offer a battery cartridge so players can save games.

Infogrames Sends Wacky Races, the Zaniest Prank-Pulling Cartoon Racing Game Skidding Into Stores This Week

‘‘...and now here they are!!! The most daredevil group of daffy drivers to ever whirl their wheels in the Wacky Races!" Infogrames announced that the wild characters from the popular Hanna-Barbera cartoon, Wacky Races

are racing to most major retail stores this week on Sega Dreamcast. Hop on board and get ready to zigzag across the nation with Penelope Pitstop, Dick Dastardly, his sidekick Muttley, Peter Perfect, and others in Wacky Races, featuring bizarre souped-up racing contraptions, outrageous characters, and plenty of dastardly pranks for hours of pure racing pleasure.

Players will choose from eleven different kooky vehicles, such as The Slag Brothers' Boulder-Mobile, capable of going off-roading and crashing into small obstacles without even slowing down! As in the cartoon, players are encouraged to win the race by any means necessary. To assist them in this task, the various bumpy tracks are filled with challenging jumps, bonuses, and traps.

''Wacky Races puts players in the driver's seat of an entirely new kind of cart racing game," said Heather Hall, product manager for Infogrames' San Jose Label. ''The advanced technology of the Dreamcast gives Wacky Races the look and feel of an actual cartoon. And, following the outrageous style and storyline of the original cartoon, gamers of all ages will especially enjoy the wild antics, goofy gags and dastardly deeds taking place throughout the game. It's fantastic!"

''Infogrames has brought the Wacky Races characters to life in a fun-filled way," said Michael Harvaky, Vice President, Warner Bros. Worldwide Publishing, Kids' WB! Music, Interactive Entertainment. ''So many great games like this have grown out of the extraordinary relationship between Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and Infogrames."

Players can choose from such game modes as Arcade, Championship, Time Trial, Endurance, and Versus. In each mode, players will try to trip each other up with a variety of absurd gadgets and weapons that are picked up along the way, producing silly cartoon conflicts between cars. Race as fast as you can around the tracks in Arcade mode because you'll need to finish in one of the top three places to move on to the next race. Earn points throughout all nine tracks and see who wins overall in Championship mode. Time Trial mode challenges players to try to finish in the fastest time possible. Endurance mode is possibly the greatest challenge for a Wacky Racer. The vehicle in last place at the end of each lap is eliminated from the race and the most ruthless daredevil wins! In Versus mode up to four players get to battle each other. The last wacky vehicle remaining wins!

Developed by Infogrames' Sheffield House, Wacky Races for Sega Dreamcast will reach most major retail stores this week at an estimated retail price of $39.99.

THQ Ships ''Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue" for Game Boy Color

THQ Inc. and Saban Entertainment, Inc. announced the release of ''Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue" for Game Boy Color. This release marks the first in THQ and Saban's five-year, multi-platform agreement. Developed by Natsume, ''Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue" is now available at major retail stores nationwide.

'''Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue' is powered by one of the strongest kids' television and action figure properties," said Germaine Gioia, vice president licensing, THQ. ''THQ is delighted to bring the explosive Power Rangers property to our extensive Game Boy Color line-up and look forward

to the release of our PlayStation and Nintendo 64 Power Rangers action adventures this fall."

‘‘We are delighted with viewer response to our eighth season of Power Rangers programming," said Elie Dekel, president, Saban consumer products. ‘‘‘Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue’ for Game Boy Color is sure to be met with the same enthusiasm in the kids’ console software arena."

‘‘Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue" is the first Game Boy Color game based on the popular Power Rangers property. In ‘‘Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue," kids can play as their favorite Power Ranger hero as members of the elite ‘Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue’ team. ‘‘Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue" will include authentic vehicles and weapons from the Power Rangers universe and gameplay inspired by the ‘‘Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue" TV show.

Sony Withdraws All Patent Claims in Connectix Case

On the day before the hearing on Connectix’ Motion to Dismiss, Sony Corporation has filed a voluntary dismissal of its patent case against Connectix. The hearing had been scheduled in front of Judge Legge in the U.S. District Court and has been cancelled as a result of the dismissal by Sony. The complaint alleged that Connectix Virtual Game Station infringed eleven patents on the Sony PlayStation® and was filed on February 14, 2000.

‘‘While we recognize that Sony may still attempt to bring some of these claims back before the court at a later date, this represents the third victory in a row for Connectix in this case," said Roy McDonald, president and CEO of Connectix Corporation. ‘‘We hope that at some point Sony will recognize the merits of cooperating with us in giving added flexibility to consumers and fans of the PlayStation. It is time for them to withdraw entirely from their course of filing baseless litigation that the courts must dismiss."

Connectix Virtual Game Station is the award-winning software that enables many popular PlayStation games to run on Pentium II or III PCs and G3 or G4 Macintosh computers including iBook and iMac. Detailed product information is available at "http://www.connectix.com".

Connectix Virtual Game Station won MacWorld’s coveted ‘‘Best of Show" award when it was released at MacWorld Expo in early January 1999. Days later, Sony brought suit to suspend sale of the product claiming copyright infringement and tarnishment of the PlayStation name and other marks. After the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal rejected Sony’s claims, Sony subsequently alleged that Connectix infringed eleven of its patents.

Seven of the nine claims in the first suit have now been dismissed by the court and the remaining two are being evaluated for possible dismissal at a hearing on September 1, 2000. The eleven patents in suit in the second action were withdrawn entirely by Sony Thursday.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Judge Lets AOL Hourly Users Sue

A judge has allowed America Online's hourly plan subscribers to sue AOL over time lost to pop-up advertisements.

At least 2.5 million subscribers have overpaid by $15 million to $20 million when pop-ups appear after they begin paying hourly rates for additional time beyond their monthly limits, the subscribers charge.

Pop-ups appear on the screen while computer users are online, forcing them to click to erase the ads and get back to what they were doing. The lawsuit claims AOL doesn't tell people that the advertising time is counted toward billing.

''They're collecting incredible sums of money from advertisers," said subscribers' attorney Andrew Tramont. ''At the same time, they're charging you for something they're getting paid to put on the screen."

Circuit Judge Fredricka Smith refused to dismiss the lawsuit June 20 and said it could go forward as a class-action.

AOL spokesman Rich D'Amato said Tuesday that the case is without merit and that the Internet service will appeal the ruling.

The lawsuit covers customers paying $5.95 a month for three hours of service and $9.95 a month for five hours of service. Those paying for unlimited access are not affected.

AOL now allows customers to avoid the pop-ups, but Tramont said that option was added after the lawsuit was filed in 1999.

Vienna, Va.-based AOL fought to have the case heard in its home state, where class-action suits are barred. But Smith ruled it would be unreasonable to force subscribers to pursue individual small-claims cases in Virginia.

Court Rules on Cybersquatting Case

A Christmas tree farm in Pennsylvania forced to give up its Internet name in a ''cybersquatting" dispute lost a Supreme Court appeal Monday.

The court, without comment, turned down arguments by Sporty's Farm that it wrongly was forced to give up the Web site name ''sportys.com" to another company.

The dispute is between Sporty's and Sportsman's Market of Batavia, Ohio, which sells aviation-related products through mail-order catalogs. Sportsman's registered ''sporty's" as a trademark in 1985 and uses the name on its catalogs.

In 1995, Omega Engineering of Stamford, Conn., registered the Internet site name sportys.com. Omega makes scientific measurement and control instruments.

Omega formed Sporty's Farm in Sterling, Pa., the following year to grow and sell Christmas trees, and it sold the Internet name to the farm.

Sporty's and Sportsman's sued each other in federal court in Connecticut in 1996. A judge, ruling under the Federal Trademark Dilution Act, decided the farm was harming Sportsman's trademark and ordered the farm to surrender the Internet name.

While the case was being appealed, Congress enacted the Anticybersquatting Consumer Protection Act last November. The law lets trademark holders force other people to give up an Internet name that is identical or very similar to the trademark. It applies to Internet names registered before and after the law took effect.

Last February, the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals relied on the new law as it upheld the judge's ruling. The appeals court said it need not send the case back to the judge because his findings were sufficient to allow the appeals court to apply the new law.

The 2nd Circuit court said there was ''overwhelming evidence" that Sporty's Farm acted with bad faith. Omega was trying to keep Sportsman's from using the ''sporty's" name on the Internet because Omega planned to begin competing with Sportsman's in the aviation consumer market, the appeals court said.

The farm's lawyers told the justices the case should have been returned to the lower court. The appeal also said that forcing Sporty's to give up its Internet name was an unlawful taking of its property without compensation.

The case is Sporty's Farm v. Sportsman's Market, 99-1752.

On the Net: For the appeals court ruling:
http://www.uscourts.gov/links.html and click on 2nd Circuit.

Microsoft Says Oracle Action Might Be 'Tip of Iceberg'

Microsoft on Wednesday lashed out at rival software maker Oracle Corp. over its admission that it hired private detectives to investigate groups supporting Microsoft, saying it could be just one of a string of anti-Microsoft activities.

''These published reports may only be the tip of the iceberg of their activities," Microsoft said without elaborating.

Oracle on Tuesday acknowledged that it hired Investigation Group to look into the activities of the Independent Institute and the National Taxpayers Union to try to uncover their links to Microsoft amid Microsoft's antitrust trial.

''Oracle's attacks on trade associations and public policy groups are disingenuous and hypocritical," Microsoft said, adding that Oracle had backed several trade groups critical of Microsoft. ''Oracle apparently

believes its business goals are more important than the free speech and privacy rights of others."

The issue came to light earlier this month when newspaper reports said private investigators had tried to pay janitors for garbage from offices of the two groups.

Email Outage Takes Toll on Excite@Home

Excite@Home experienced email service delays for millions of its customers this week, joining Yahoo’s woes with technology that supports such services.

Excite@Home told Reuters its email has been delayed for about two days, since one of the two "load balancers" that supports the system failed. As of midday today, the balancer was fixed, but the email was delayed one to two hours because of backlogs.

An Excite@Home representative said the company has had periodic disruptions with its email in recent months, but it is implementing a new system to improve service, according to Reuters.

As previously reported, Yahoo was hit with service interruptions yesterday, with people complaining they were locked out of areas including email accounts, instant messaging and the Yahoo Finance site.

Some Yahoo users said they began to notice problems early yesterday morning.

"I can’t get into my Yahoo mailbox or my personalized Yahoo start page," said Jason Typrin, a Yahoo account holder in the Los Angeles area. "I haven’t been able to get in since-about 9 (a.m.) when I first tried."

A Yahoo representative confirmed troubles with the network but said service had been restored by the afternoon. The representative said problems stemmed from the company’s service providers, including Global Center.

Global Center spokeswoman Secret Fenton said the cause appeared to be a fiber cut in the network backbone run by parent Global Crossing. She said the cut appeared to be located in the San Francisco Bay Area but added that the investigation is ongoing.

"The network does work. There is not a point of failure," she said. "The traffic has been rerouted, but that can take a little time."

Internet performance measurement firm Keynote Systems said Yahoo was hit with a major breakdown for about an hour yesterday afternoon. Keynote spokesman Daniel Todd said Yahoo Finance and Yahoo Travel appeared to be completely unavailable to outside consumers for about a half hour, but he said the services were restored soon after that.

He said the main Yahoo Web page was not affected.

Fake E-Mail Threatens to Cut Hotmail Users

Some users of Microsoft Corp.’s free Hotmail e-mail service are getting a bogus message, purportedly from a company official, threatening to cancel their accounts because the service is bogged down with too many customers.

Microsoft quickly responded by saying the message was a prank and that Hotmail, one of the largest Web-based e-mail services in cyberspace, was in great health.

‘‘It’s a chain e-mail that is a hoax. There is no truth in it whatsoever," said company spokeswoman Jessica Dobberstein.

She said Microsoft does not know how many Hotmail users received the bogus message.

Microsoft is considering posting a message on Hotmail telling users to ignore the crank e-mail, Dobberstein said.

The message, allegedly from a ‘‘Jon Henerd" of the "Hotmail Admin. Dept.," tells recipients they will be kicked off the service if they do not prove they actively use their accounts by forwarding the e-mail.

‘‘Hotmail is overloading and we need to get rid of some people and we want to find out which users are actually using their Hotmail accounts," said the message, a copy of which was sent to a Reuters reporter.

The message itself was contradictory, saying, ‘‘So, within a month’s time, anyone who does not receive this email with the exact subject heading, will be deleted off our server. Please forward this email so that we know you are still using this account."

Then, it referred to forwarding the email rather than receiving it. ‘‘If you do not pass this letter to anyone we will delete your account," it said.

Bought by Microsoft in 1996, Hotmail has 68 million users and more than a quarter-million new customers signing up every day, according to Microsoft. The service lets users send and receive e-mail for free from any computer connected to the Internet.

Earlier this month, media reports said some Hotmail users were hit by outages that left them unable to access their mail and in some cases erased address books and saved messages.

Microsoft has tried hard to build its consumer Internet services to compete against heavyweights like America Online Inc. and Yahoo! Inc.

Intel Gives Newest Chip a Name: Pentium 4

Intel Corp. on Wednesday announced that it will call its newest microprocessor for personal computers and laptops Pentium 4.

Known until now by its code name ‘‘Willamette," the name is hardly a surprise. Intel’s Pentium-class chip -- which functions as the ‘‘brains" of PCs -- is one of the most widely recognized brands in the world. Intel always initially names its chips after rivers in Oregon, where it is the

state’s largest private employer.

Part of its name recognition also stems from a flaw that was found in the earliest Pentium chip in 1994, which eventually prompted the Santa Clara, Calif.-based chip firm to offer free replacements for any customers who wanted them. That move cost Intel $475 million in charges.

The Pentium 4 will be introduced in the second half of this year and is aimed at offering faster performance, as well as enhanced graphics, video and other capabilities.

IBM Unveils World’s Fastest Computer

International Business Machines Corp on Thursday unveiled the fastest computer in the world, which the U.S. government will use to simulate nuclear weapons tests.

The supercomputer, able to process more in a second than one person with a calculator could do in 10 million years, was made for the Department of Energy’s Accelerated Strategic Computing Initiative (ASCI).

The system could ease congressional opposition to the United States signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, banning all actual nuclear weapons testing worldwide.

‘‘Without underground testing, we need simulations to make sure the stockpile is safe, reliable and operational," said David Cooper, a member of the President’s Council on Computing and chief information officer of Lawrence Livermore Labs in California, where the system will be run.

Called ASCI White, the supercomputer will churn the factors involved in a nuclear detonation, including the weapon’s age and design. This could eventually allow the government to manage its entire stockpile of nuclear weapons without any real nuclear tests, Cooper said.

The U.S. Senate last year declined to ratify the test ban treaty, insisting on the nation’s right to continue testing nuclear weapons underground.

‘‘If you polled the weapons designers right now, they would say that (actual) testing is still more effective," Cooper said.

The new supercomputer is a major step toward full simulation but is not yet capable of testing the nuclear weapons stockpile to standards set by experts.

A system that could replace actual nuclear tests must have a computing capability of 100 teraflops, or trillions of operations per second, versus the ASCI White computing capacity as tested by IBM of 12.3 teraflops, Cooper said.

‘‘We’re still on a timescale to do (100 teraflops) by 2004," he added.

The system contains 8,192 copper microprocessors and is 1,000 times more powerful than its chess-playing predecessor "Deep Blue," which defeated World Champion Gary Kasparov in the historic 1997 chess showdown between man and machine.

IBM is selling the system, which will take up the floor space equivalent to two basketball courts and weighs as much as 17 full-sized elephants, to the DOE for $110 million.

But designing the most powerful computer in the world has other pay-offs for IBM. The prestige could help it take a greater share in the supercomputer market, and it could use the advanced technology in its lower-level computer products.

‘‘We’re seeing more and more that deep computing will become a critical element in how real businesses run every day, and that it’s not just in the territory of the propeller heads (technology buffs)," said Nicholas Donofrio, IBM senior vice president technology and manufacturing.

IBM officials and analysts said parts of the design of ASCI White, which connects 512 separate computers together with high performance switches and software, could be built into computers used for everything from electronic business to designing cars.

IBM often sells its leading edge technologies to its rivals in the computer industry, using the proceeds to fund its enormous research and development budget.

‘‘We could take elements of this system and sell it to other people," said Donofrio. ‘‘Some of the things that might find their way from ASCI White into the other people’s systems are the switch or chips that do the memory control."

‘‘This is part of IBM’s product road map," said DH Brown analyst Richard Partridge. ‘‘They have the government fund the extreme end and make sure they address all the difficult problems before they create products for tasks that are not as difficult as nuclear weapons stockpile management."

In 1999, IBM became the leader in the traditional supercomputer market, in which some 250 computers that range in price from $2 million to $100 million are sold every year, for use in weather predictions, research and encryption, according to Joseph. IBM now has 30 percent of that market, Joseph said.

‘‘This system becomes the biggest computer on earth," said Joseph. ‘‘Having that kind of market presence is everything in the traditional supercomputer market and will allow them to take more market share."

Apple Dumping iMacs for Re-vamp; Supply Dwindling

With well-tuned surgical precision, Apple seems to be orchestrating a smooth transition between the soon-to-be defunct iMac models and their new kin by "dumping" iMacs through retailer warehouses.

Numerous MacCentral sources report availability of 300MHz blueberry-colored iMacs, 400MHz iMac DV’s and 400MHz iMac DV Special Edition models are drying up fast with less than three weeks left until Apple CEO Steve Jobs debuts his company’s much-expected re-vamp of the consumer iMac computer line at Macworld Expo on Wednesday, July 19.

"We’re definitely seeing iMac availability tightening as we get closer to

the debut of new models. I would say it is going to be very difficult to buy a high-end iMac beginning July 1 through July 15," Kevin McCarthy, Apple analyst at Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette in New York, told MacCentral.

Five Apple independent dealers located across the U.S. told MacCentral they have less than five units left of each iMac model and in some cases have no inventories of certain models at all.

"I've got three 300MHz iMacs left, four 400MHz models in two different colors, and three SE's left to be sold," a Kansas City-based Apple Specialist said. "I'm just not going to be stuck with those models. If a customer wants one, I'll order it with money down."

Ironically, another dealer in Philadelphia said he is taking more orders for new, unannounced iMacs than he is for existing models.

"It's funny, but I've got customers putting down money on new iMacs that we have no price or specific details about," said the dealer, who asked not to be identified. "When I've got customers giving me money for a ghost product, why would I inventory soon-to-be discontinued iMacs?"

Two other independent dealers contacted by MacCentral located in California and Texas confirmed they have taken advanced orders on new, anticipated iMacs.

As for inventory numbers, sources report that almost any iMac model a customer wants can be found, but that the situation is tightening.

"You might have to wait for a specific model or color, depending on who you try and buy from," one independent Mac dealer said.

A check of available iMac inventory through Ingram Micro Inc., a computer hardware and software distributor to retail stores, shows less than 1,000 low-end 350MHz iMacs, less than 5,000 iMac DV models and less than 700 DV SE units left in the United States. Of the most popular, the blueberry-colored DV model, Ingram has inventory of less than 600 across the U.S, sources report.

Apple has recruited Costco, a U.S.-based retailer warehouse, to get rid of a large chunk of its remaining iMac inventory. The models are being sold exclusively in the U.S., according to Costco sources, with the largest inventory being of 300MHz iMacs and DV SE models.

"I was at the Carmel Mountain Ranch Costco in San Diego and much to my surprise, they were selling iMacs in both regular and DV flavors," MacCentral reader Luke Brannon wrote. "The iMac DV had a promotion program running and was located at the very front of the computer section."

Costco sources tell MacCentral that part of the agreement with Apple was to provide prominent placement of iMac DV or DV SE models at the end of an isle, or what is known in the retail industry as an "end cap."

In what one Costco source called 'Operation Dump,' the retail warehouse is selling the 300MHz iMac for $949US, 400MHz iMac DV for $1249 and 400MHz DV SE for $1449 -- $50 less than the normal street and mail order catalog prices. Not all models or colors are available at all Costco locations and are not available for purchase through the company's Web site.

Sources report Costco has a little less than 2,000 iMacs in inventory

nationwide to sell and are not receiving price protection from Apple. Price protection is a policy many PC makers use by guaranteeing retailers a rebate on the difference in their cost after a new model is released.

Increasingly, Apple is using retail warehouses like Costco to clear out their remaining stock of soon-to-be discontinued products.

"Having been burned in the past and having to clear out a lot of excess inventory, Apple has now learned how to bleed the channel all but dry before coming out with new models," Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette Apple analyst, Kevin McCarthy said.

While it might be logical for Apple to push iMac inventory through independent Apple retailers, Apple is finding it more difficult to convince dealers to buy products that will soon be discontinued.

"Forget the fact customers are not buying iMacs in anticipation of new models," one dealer said. "Apple refuses to give me price protection on old models. They can't expect me to take that kind of risk."

A number of years ago, Apple did grant price protection on certain Macintosh products, but has since dropped the practice because it feels it is a money-losing proposition for the company.

While Apple continues to improve its ability to control inventories and remaining stock, Steve Fortuna, Apple analyst at Merrill Lynch thinks there will always be situations where Apple will use retailers like Costco to clear inventories.

"Although I'm sure Apple dealers, CompUSA and catalogers don't like it, they need to accept the fact Apple will use warehouse retailers more and more to clear stock if they have to," Fortuna told MacCentral. "Business is business."

Handheld Devices Grab Limelight at PC Expo

The biggest summer trade show shouts it loud and clear: the personal computer era is dead, long live the handheld gizmo!

Visitors to this week's 18th annual PC Expo need not wander far beyond the big-name computer makers' facade fronting the entrance to see how much the industry has shifted away from bulky, general-purpose PCs.

The 85,000 attendees at what is billed as the world's largest PC show received a panoramic view of what's ahead in electronic gadgets -- from handheld computers to digital cameras, recordable compact discs and Web phones.

But beyond a few big names of the personal computer era -- IBM, Gateway, Toshiba and Hewlett-Packard -- it's hard to find many of the beige boxes that ushered in a worldwide personal technology revolution two decades ago.

''It's all devices orbiting the PC," veteran industry analyst Richard Doherty, of Seaford, N.Y.-based Envisioneering Group, said.

Organizers of PC Expo say the PC is no longer the point.

‘‘It’s mobile and wireless technology, it’s Web-enabled solutions, it’s pervasive business computing," said Randy Zane, spokesman for trade-show organizer Miller-Freeman. ‘‘We don’t want to change the name because people know it."

Look closely at a major PC maker these days and you’ll find an Internet appliance developer in the making.

Those computers that PC pioneer IBM has put out front on display look like television screens with the computer box missing. Instead, the brains of the computer are built into the back of the flat-panel display.

Meanwhile, IBM is showing off Palm-based handheld computers, cellphones and wristwatch computers in private, part of a push in recent years into what it calls the next generation of "pervasive computing."

Compaq Computer Corp., the world’s No. 1 PC maker, didn’t bother to hire a major booth this year, opting instead to flog its products at kiosks located in the massive booths of partners’ Microsoft and Novell. Second-ranked Dell Computer Corp. even dispensed with a kiosk, settling for one-on-one meetings with analysts and journalists.

Scouting around, one can find a kiosk for Compaq’s new iPaq handheld computer, squeezed behind Tekware Solutions, a 15-person firm that sells handhelds used by sports stadium food franchises.

‘‘You’ll see us all over the place, just not in one location," Simon Eastwick, a Compaq server marketer.

There’s no single star of the show but rather a chorus line of competing wireless handheld computers from Palm Inc., the industry leader, Handspring Inc., and newcomer Sony Corp., the consumer electronics giant, all based on Palm software.

Taking advantage of the growing convergence between computers and consumer home electronics, more than 50 of the conference’s 600 exhibitors showcased a new generation of rewritable digital video disk players and related equipment, capable of videotaping and recording two-hour-plus videos.

‘‘The show has more consumer electronics in it than any other PC show in history," Doherty said.

The absence for the first time of any PC makers from among the keynote speakers list signals the shift: Jeff Hawkins, a co-founder of Palm and now head of rival Handspring, kicked off the conference on Tuesday, while Amazon.com Inc. founder Jeff Bezos spoke on Wednesday, while futurist Ray Kurzweil is set to speak on Thursday about technology in 2050.

There’s no small distinction between PCs and the newer Web appliances: Many of the tools and services bundled onto PCs are now being split up and offered separately on a variety of special-purpose devices.

The personal computer industry is not so much dying as splitting into two: new access and data input devices emphasize simplicity, mobility and light weight. Complex tasks are handled via wireless links to data stored on centralized computers.

For while PCs are adaptable, one-size-fits-all systems, appliances are

targeted devices, designed for specific purposes such as personal organizers, wireless communications, or Internet music and movie players.

‘‘There’s probably not going to be one all-dancing, all singing device," said Al Kessler, chief operating officer of Palm Inc., the leading maker of handheld computers, said while speaking on a panel of Internet appliance makers.

But though much of the marketing firepower has shifted to small, sexy handhelds suited for quick e-mails and simple electronic transactions, only PCs can provide the processing power and flexibility necessary to run the majority of existing data processing software, despite their bulkiness.

Still, PCs used by home and office workers are projected to grow at an annual growth rate of 15 percent over the next three years and ship about 200 million units by 2003, according to a recent report by ING Barings analyst Robert Cihra.

Microsoft Unveils Email Plans for New Mac Office

Microsoft has christened new email software for the next version of its Macintosh Office 2001 software suite with the name "Entourage."

In April, Microsoft inadvertently leaked information about Entourage, then code-named Alpaca, through a posting on the Mactopia Web site.

Office 2001 for the Mac is slated for release later this year.

The largest single new addition in Office for the Macintosh, Entourage offers some of the features of Outlook 2000 without some of the baggage associated with the Windows software. Like Outlook, Entourage offers an address book, calendar and task manager that is integrated with an email program.

Entourage is not dependent on Exchange Server for full use of its features, different from Outlook. With the personal information manager (PIM), Microsoft hopes to fill a void that has put Mac users at a productivity disadvantage compared with their Windows counterparts, Office 2001 lead project manager Glenn Meyers said.

Until now, Microsoft’s only PIM was a Mac version of Outlook that required Exchange Server 5.5, although Outlook Express 5.02 offers an address book. Given that only about 10 percent of Mac owners rely on Exchange, Microsoft wanted to offer improved scheduling and contact features with Outlook Express 5.02.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software maker will continue to offer Outlook 8.2.1 and Outlook Express 5.02, but it expects many Office users will favor Entourage.

The program allows a message to be edited in Word, can track the last 150 messages, and can link to other data, such as contacts, email, tasks and documents. The new address book features color-coded categories and access to contacts from any Office application.

Aside from Entourage, other Office 2001 features include Project Gallery,

a tool that can build documents for specific tasks and convert PowerPoint slide shows to Apple QuickTime format.

With the release of its second beta version this week, Office 2001 is on track for release in the second half of the year.

Senate Passes Web School Proposals

Senators grappling with how best to monitor the Internet in schools passed two competing proposals Tuesday, leaving it up to a joint panel to develop a compromise.

The aim of the two proposals, one by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., and the other by Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., both seek to put certain safeguards in place as the number of schools hooked up to the Internet continues to grow.

But some senators complained that the McCain amendment was too restrictive for the nation’s schools.

The McCain amendment would invite the Federal Communications Commission ‘‘to be the de facto national censor," said Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt. ‘‘This broad self-censoring imposed by the McCain amendment on schools and libraries will lead to a chilling of free speech to the detriment of our nation’s children and library patrons."

Thousands of schools have started getting connected to the Internet through a 1996 subsidy known as e-rate, which is funded through higher phone bills for customers.

About 82 percent of the nation’s public schools are participating in the program, senators said.

McCain’s amendment, which passed 95-3, would require schools and libraries who benefit from the subsidy to install some form of blocking or filtering technology to restrict children’s access to pornography and other obscene material. Voting against McCain’s amendment were Sen. Russell Feingold, D-Wisc., Sen. Robert Kerrey, D-Neb. and Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J.

‘‘As we wire America’s children to the Internet, we are inviting these dirt bags to prey upon our children in every classroom and library in America," McCain said. ‘‘Parents, taxpayers, deserve to have a realistic faith that, when they entrust their children to our nation’s schools and libraries, that this trust will not be betrayed."

But detractors complained that McCain’s amendment by allowing the FCC to certify that schools are using the proper filtering materials gives the agency too broad authority.

Santorum’s amendment, which passed 75-24, gives schools the option of installing the blocking technology or developing an Internet use policy.

‘‘The community, not the federal government, will determine what matter is inappropriate for minors and what is the most effective way to protect children," Santorum said.

The two plans, which were attached to a massive spending plan for the departments of labor and health and human services, will now have to be

worked out before a conference committee of Republican and Democratic lawmakers.

A less controversial and non-related Internet amendment, offered by Leahy and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah and attached to the McCain plan, would require large Internet service providers to begin offering filtering software to customers over the next three years.

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